



Representing the communities of Agoura, Agoura Hills, Calabasas, Encino, Hidden Hills, Lake Sherwood, Malibu, Oak Park, Pacific Palisades, Port Hueneme, portions of Sherman Oaks, portions of Oxnard, Santa Monica, Tarzana, Topanga, portions of Westlake Village, and Woodland Hills

December 2009

"Race to the Top" Funding #1 Education Priority

Earlier this month, the Obama Administration finally unveiled the long-awaited deadlines and guidelines that states must follow in order to compete for critical Federal stimulus "Race to the Top" (RTTT) education grants. My highest priority right now is to insure that California is competitively positioned when the Governor submits our application in January for the first phase of grants, but at the same time creating thoughtful, effective reform.

To accomplish this, I've been working on a major bill in an open and collaborative effort that has included education stakeholders around the state, and that is drawing from the information received at a series of hearings I've held as Chair of the Assembly Education Committee.



The third hearing was held in Los Angeles on November 18. Experts in the field provided important testimony to the Committee Members, as did members of the public. This third hearing focused on developing great teachers and leaders, and turning around struggling schools. The fourth and final hearing was held in Sacramento on December 2.

On December 10, my RTTT bill, ABX5 8, passed out of the Assembly. Here are a few of the main provisions, all of which closely conform with the Obama Administration RTTT guidelines and will make long-term improvements to our children's educational environment.

- Identifying the persistently lowest-achieving schools, and insuring that they have the resources they need to make change.
- Requiring the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop a set of state content standards in language arts and math that are internationally benchmarked, that build toward college and career readiness, and that reflect the national common core standards being developed by a national consortium of education leaders.
- Removing the cap on the number of charter schools that can operate in California, while requiring modest new fiscal and academic accountability standards for charter schools that are consistent with those for traditional public schools.
- Targeting a portion of RTTT funds to low-achieving schools for high-quality, targeted professional development to leverage a positive environment in schools.
- Continuing to expand California's data system and to use that data to improve classroom instruction and to better inform parents and the public about student progress.

California could reasonably qualify for anywhere from \$300 million to \$700 million in this one-time stimulus money, based on how high we score on the RTTT criteria. The guiding principals for AB5X 8 are:

- To do the right thing for California's children.
- To be bold, to move out of our comfort zone, and to position California to be competitive.
- And to ensure stakeholder collaboration which underscores the spirit of the Obama Administration's reform efforts.

Bits 'n' Pieces ...

- I participated in the first hearing of the **Joint Assembly/Senate Select Committee on Improving State Government**, and was pleased to have been appointed by Speaker Bass to serve on his important bipartisan committee. A series of five informational hearings are being held around the state to address what we all know is a pressing need for state governmental reform. At this first hearing, we discussed prior state reform issues, Federal and state models of legislative decision-making; bipartisanship, oversight, and integrity; and began a discussion on budget process reforms.
- I had an informational table at the **Las Virgenes Municipal Water District's Landscape Fair**. This was a wonderful outreach event hosted for the first time by the water district to introduce area residents to the wide range of services and options that are available to incorporate smart and water-wise landscaping techniques into their yards that will produce beautiful results, save scarce water, and cut water bills at the same time. Congratulations to the District for an important and very successful event.

- I very much enjoyed participating for the first time in the annual **Hidden Hills Fiesta Parade**. Community members and organizations along with local elected officials paraded through this beautiful and smallest city in the 41st Assembly District. Equestrian oriented, there were residents riding horseback, in classic cars, and on foot, greeting neighbors all along the trail-lined route. Having grown up in Virginia in horse country, it was great fun to be able to participate in this



celebration of the strong sense of community that Hidden Hills residents and their elected leaders have fostered and protected for so many years.

- I participated in an **education symposium in Santa Barbara** hosted by the UCSB Gevirtz School of Education called "Crafting California's New School Finance." We heard a number of presentations on why California needs to reform our finance system, including from former State Senator and former Chair of the Senate Education Committee, Gary Hart. I believe it all comes down to needing a simpler system instead of the current complex and irrational methods used to fund our schools.

I've introduced 15 bills in the Assembly during the 2009 session addressing schools or education, including AB8 (a different bill from AB5X 8) which tackled our need for to provide adequate and equitable school funding, and to ensure more accountability and transparency in our finance systems. It passed out of the Legislature with bipartisan support, but I am disappointed that the Governor chose to veto this reform measure.

- On November 13, it was a pleasure to join the Santa Monica YWCA at their workshop on **"Women Aiding Change"** directed at opportunities that women, in this case, have to influence decisions that middle-school kids are too often making that are not in their best interests.
- On November 19 I attended a very interesting forum at Santa Monica High School called **"Flex Your Civic Muscles,"** designed to discuss multiple issues including education and the environment, and how students can become better involved in their communities. The event was sponsored by the schools chapter of the SAGE program (Students for the Advancement of Global Entrepreneurship).

Santa Susana Field Lab Cleanup Stalled by Lawsuit

Over the past many months, the Department of Toxic Substances Control has been engaged in negotiations with the Department of Energy, NASA, and The Boeing Company on a Consent Order whereby these three "Responsible Parties" would voluntarily agree to comply with SB990, state law governing the cleanup. In its public pronouncements, Boeing has represented to the community time after time that it would comply. Any question about the good faith of those statements was settled when the last draft Consent Order was presented to Boeing to sign, with strong and binding terms regarding SB990 compliance. Instead of reaching for the pen, Boeing sent for the lawyers and headed to the courthouse.

I am fully confident in the state's position. SB990 is legal, it's constitutional, and it's achievable. Will the SB990 cleanup be easy? No. Is it a standard that is necessary to protect the health of the community? Yes. Can we do it? Absolutely, yes. It will take more work and more persistence, and it may be more costly for Boeing. However, protecting Boeing's billions of dollars in profits is not the standard. Making sure that more people aren't sickened by contaminants that leave this site is.

Boeing's new "greenwashing" campaign that the extent of the contamination is so vast that SB990 cleanup "could cause unintended consequences" to plants and wildlife is ludicrous and offensive. They cannot have it both ways. By conceding the massive contamination and level of cleanup it will take, their argument to be excused from doing so fails. SB990 is the law of the land. Stay tuned.

Perfect Scores for Protecting Seniors and Consumers

I am honored to have earned perfect scores in 2009 by four advocacy groups for my voting record on legislation to protect seniors, consumers and individuals with disabilities in California.

Both the Congress of California Seniors, a broad-based coalition advocating on behalf of the elderly, and the California Alliance for Retired Americans, a statewide group working for social and economic justice, recognized my 100% voting record on bills they backed.

I also earned a perfect score by voting for 16 bills supported by the Consumer Federation of California. Only 14 other members of the 80-member Assembly scored as high. Issues included identity theft, health care reform, household toxics, food safety, false advertising and deceptive insurance practices.

Finally, California Communities United Institute, which advocates for collaboration among communities, named me one of 13 members with a perfect record on 98 bills the group supported in 2009. The legislation targeted issues important to people with AIDS, the poor, the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender population, women, and people of color.

Late breaking ... On the environmental side, I just learned that I have scored a 100% voting record with the **California League of Conservation Voters**. Out of 80 Assemblymembers, only 12 of us received this perfect score.

Wonderful News for our State Parks...

... and there hasn't been much of it for a long time, given the deep deficit that the state budget has been in and the promised cutbacks and closures by the Governor.

Just a week ago, however, the National Park Service stepped in with a grant of \$939,169 to the Angeles District of California State Parks. This grant will now ensure that state parks in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area will remain open and operating at last year's service levels. The public should experience no reduction in services or operating hours when they visit the many beautiful state parks and beaches within the National Recreation Area.



The grant closes a funding shortfall identified by California State Parks for fiscal year 2009-2010, and is made possible by entrance fee funds to national parks in California that were tied up in litigation. With that money now freed up, it has saved California's state parks, at least for another year.

Great credit is due to the partnership efforts of Woody Smeck, Superintendent, Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, and Ron Schafer, District Superintendent of the Angeles District for California State Parks, for this fine example of what a strong working relationship between park agencies can accomplish. Endless thanks to both of them and for all the other people who were involved in obtaining this grant.

No Prison Hospital in Camarillo!

Congratulations to the Prison Hospital Action Committee on the great news just a few days ago that the Federal pressure to build a new prison hospital in Camarillo has been beaten back. It was a bad project, in the wrong place, and would have been an enormous expenditure of scarce dollars, when alternatives were clearly available. I was pleased to be able to facilitate some meetings last year on an issue regarding the ability of the proposed hospital even to have the necessary water service to operate. The Action Committee did an amazing job of pulling the facts together and lobbying effectively for the community. They should be proud.

405 Freeway Improvements Update

As the I-405 HOV Lane Project gets underway, Metro (Metropolitan Transportation Authority), Caltrans, and the City of Los Angeles, all project partners, hosted the first of many community meetings on November 19. The purpose of the meetings is to keep residents informed of the progress and to provide an avenue to address community concerns while the project is under construction over the next few years.

The project will add a 10-mile HOV lane and improve supporting infrastructure such as ramps, bridges and sound walls while widening lanes from the I-10 to the 101. It should also reduce existing and forecasted traffic congestion. In addition, the project will improve both existing and future mobility and enhance safety throughout the corridor.

The I-405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project features include:

- Adding a 10-mile HOV lane on the northbound I-405 between the I-10 and US-101 freeways.
- Removing and replacing the Skirball Center, Sunset Blvd. and Mulholland bridges.
- Realigning 27 on and off ramps.
- Widening 13 existing underpasses and structures.
- Constructing approximately 18 miles of retaining wall and sound wall.

As this massive project gets underway questions and concerns may arise along the length of the project. For that reason, Metro has instituted a hotline for individuals to contact. That number is (213) 922-3665, or you can e-mail i405@metro.net to let them know you would like to be included on meeting notices and updates. For more information on the project you can go to http://www.metro.net/projects_studies/I405/ where you will also find construction and community meeting notices as well as specifics about the project.

Assembly Fellowship Program for 2010-2011

The California State Assembly Fellowship Program, founded in 1957, is one of the national's oldest and most prestigious legislative fellowship programs. Every year 18 highly-motivated individuals are invited to become Assembly Fellows and to have a unique opportunity to directly participate in the legislative process through full-time work as a professional legislative staff member. Fellows' understanding of state governance is deepened by participation in a graduate seminar conducted by California State University, Sacramento. They receive graduate units from CSUS, a monthly stipend of \$1,972, and a combination of benefits.

Is the Fellows program for you? If you're interested, applications to be a 2010-2011 Fellow are due no later than February 24, 2010. Informational brochures with more detail are available on request at my District Office.

My Assembly Fellows

- I'm pleased to have one of the 18 new Assembly Fellows working in my Capitol Office for the next year. **Pilar Whitaker** just finished up at UCLA, obtaining her BA in English, and having been selected for the UCLA College Honors Program and the Dean's Honors List last year. Pilar previously worked at the Natural Resources Defense Council and at the UCLA School of Public Affairs, and we're excited to have her on board for what will certainly be another busy year.
- Last year, I was also fortunate to have an Assembly Fellow, **Irene Ho**. If you request an informational brochure from our office, you'll see Irene's smiling face, and her quote that: "The Fellowship experience has been one of the most rewarding in my life. It has exposed me to the real world of politics and introduced me to a great network of friends and mentors in the process." Irene was such an asset to my Capitol Office over the past year that we hired her as a full-time staffer, who is now working, among other things, on issues related to health, human services, and local government.

In Memoriam

The 41st AD suffered the loss of two gentlemen, in the truest sense of the word, this month.



Former Assemblymember Nao Takasugi

On November 19, Oxnard resident and former Assemblymember, Nao Takasugi, died at age 87. Nao was a much-beloved member of the Oxnard community. Born in Oxnard in 1922, he was the son of Japanese immigrant parents who opened a market in Oxnard in 1907 in a building that still stands. In 1941, at age 19, the bombing of Pearl Harbor interrupted his college education and he, native born, and his family were interned behind barbed wire fencing. With a number of other Japanese-American students, Nao was released after two years to return to college, but his family remained at the Gila River internment camp for the remaining two years of the war.

After receiving his MBA from UCLA, he came back to Oxnard to work in the store that a loyal employee had kept going all during the internment.

Nao began his public life in 1976, winning two terms on the Oxnard City Council, and then went on to serve six years in the State Assembly. Up until the time of his death, he served on the Oxnard Harbor District Board. Virtually anyone who knew Nao would include in their description of him the words “kind,” “gracious,” and that he was always “a gentleman.” My sincere condolences to Judy, his wife of 57 years, and to his five children and extended family.

Pacific Palisades social justice activist Bob Berke

On November 28, Pacific Palisades resident Bob Berke passed away suddenly at age 61. Bob graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Pomona College and went on to get his law degree from UCLA. Both his practice and public life were focused on civil rights and social justice. He worked for the Center for Law in the Public Interest, served as President of the California Attorneys for Criminal Justice, and became very active in the Pacific Palisades Democratic Club and finally President of the Club. Bob proudly boasted that the Santa Monica Democratic headquarters office that he helped open in 2008 made hundreds of thousands of calls on behalf of Barack Obama and other progressive candidates and ballot initiatives.

An active member of Death Penalty Focus, Bob never stopped fighting for human rights and people at the margins of society. He is survived by his very proud parents, and son Chad Berke, to whom I extend my heartfelt condolences. Bob was a lovely man with a constant smile, and will be greatly missed.

Committee and Legislative Appointments

Chair, Assembly Education Committee
Chair, Assembly Education Committee of the 5th Extraordinary Session
Chair, Select Committee on Higher Education in the 21st Century
Chair, Select Committee on Cleanup of Santa Susana Field Laboratory

Member:

Assembly Budget Committee
Assembly Judiciary Committee
Assembly Natural Resources Committee
Budget Subcommittee #1 – Health and Human Services
Budget Subcommittee #2 – Education Finance
Select Committee on Community Colleges
Select Committee on Domestic Violence
Select Committee on Improving State Government
Select Committee on Lowering California's High School Dropout Rates
Joint Select Committee on Reform

Member, State Allocation Board
California Commission on the Status of Women

Legislative Liaison, Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission
Legislative Participant, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy

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